

HOW TO... Use ObjectDock

Windows' Start menu and taskbar can soon get cluttered, making your applications and documents hard to find. David Ludlow frees up his desktop with ObjectDock

OBJECTDOCK



Microsoft has made several updates to the Windows interface over the years, but the taskbar and the Start menu have been part of it since Windows 95.

The taskbar does a reasonable job of letting you switch quickly between applications, but you can't resize it, and opening lots of windows soon makes it difficult to read. The Start menu also gets cluttered the more applications you install.

ObjectDock provides a new way of switching between open windows, and a faster, easier way to launch applications. It's available for free from www.stardock.com/products/objectdock, and it's also in the Expert Toolkit section of the *Computer Shopper* cover DVD. ObjectDock works with both Windows XP and Windows Vista.

When you first use ObjectDock, you have to launch it from the Start menu, but it will start automatically with Windows after that.

1 When ObjectDock first launches it sits just above the taskbar. The icons get larger as you roll your mouse over them, making them easier to see. ObjectDock comes with a set of default icons, including one for your web browser and your email application. Click the Internet logo to launch your web browser.

2 ObjectDock has a Weather Docklet. Find it by moving your mouse over the icons and click to configure it. Enter your location and click OK to save the settings. The weather icon will now show today's weather. Hover your mouse over it and separate windows appear showing the forecast for the next five days.

3 At the moment, ObjectDock only has icons to launch applications, but you can make it display all currently open windows – a bit like the taskbar does, only clearer. Click on the Dock Properties icon followed by the Dock Contents tab and select Display open windows along with my icons. All your current applications will appear in the Dock. By default it displays these applications on the right-hand side of the Dock, but you can move them to the left using the Taskbar Placement menu.

4 With all your open applications displayed in the Dock, there's little need for the Windows taskbar. Go to ObjectDock Properties, click on the General tab and select Hide the Windows Taskbar. If you want to move the Dock to a new position, click on the Positioning tab. From the Positioning drop-down menus you can place the Dock at the Top, Bottom, Left or Right of the screen and, if you've got more than one monitor, select which display it should appear in. By selecting Hide off-screen when not in use, you can make the Dock disappear when you're not using it. Adjusting the Delay to re-show when the mouse nears Dock slider, you can set how long it takes the Dock to reappear when you move the mouse towards it. Finally, you may find that the icons are too large and are dropping off the sides of the screen. You can adjust this by selecting the Appearance tab. Moving the Icon Size slider adjusts the size of the icons; moving the Magnified Size slider adjusts the size of the icons when the mouse is over them. Changes to the Dock appear in real-time as you make them, so you can adjust the settings until you're happy.

5 Your Dock probably looks a little bare at the moment, but it's easy to add new elements. Open ObjectDock Properties and select the Docklets tab. Here you can add Separators to divide icons into logical groups, and pre-configured Docklets, such as one to search the internet, a clock and the Weather Docklet we've already configured. Add the Start Menu Launcher if you want quick access to all the applications installed on your PC. New Docklets automatically appear on the right-hand side of the Dock, just before the list of open Tasks. You can add a new Shortcut Docklet and configure the application it launches, but it's easier to drag and drop short cuts from the Start menu, and you can place them where you want.

6 Organising the Dock is easy. You can drag and move icons to place them in the order you want them. Using Separator Docklets, as described in Step 5, helps you to keep your Dock neatly organised. If there are any items in the Dock that you don't want, simply drag them off the Dock on to the desktop and they'll disappear in a puff of smoke.

If you don't like the default icons that ObjectDock has used, you can change them easily. Right-click on an icon and select Dock Entry Properties. Click Change Image and select a different icon from the list. You can also use any PNG file with a transparent background and a resolution of 192x192. Alternatively, you can drag an existing icon off the Dock, such as My Computer, and drag the Windows shortcut on to the dock instead. This will fill ObjectDock with familiar icons. **CS**

